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**Commission on the Status of Women**
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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

## Statement submitted by Mothers' Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

1. Mothers' Union is a Christian mission organization working through grass-roots membership to support families and communities around the world. Motivated by their faith, our 3.6 million members in 78 countries fight inequality and discrimination against women.

### Beijing Platform for Action — 15 years on

2. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action set ambitious goals for furthering gender equality, development and peace. Some progress has been made since 1995 but the present statement outlines how much remains to be achieved.

### Women, girls and poverty

3. Across the world, 1.4 billion people live on less than $1.25 per day.[1] Many indicators show that females are more likely to experience poverty than males — 68 per cent of female-headed households are classified as poor compared to 31 per cent of male-headed households.[1]

### Education and training

4. Out of the 71 million children who are out of school across the world, 57 per cent are girls. Currently, 95 girls per 100 boys in the developing world are enrolled in primary education and 94 girls per 100 boys in secondary education. However, parity has been reached in only 30 per cent of countries with available data.[1]

### Health

5. Globally, over half a million women die each year from causes related to pregnancy or birth — a figure that has not decreased since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. Factors contributing to maternal mortality include the lack of skilled health workers, drugs and medical equipment, and the prevalence of disease and poor nutrition.[2] HIV/AIDS now affects more women than men in sub-Saharan Africa.[3]

### Violence

6. Up to 70 per cent of women across the world experience physical or sexual violence at the hands of men, in their lifetime, and violence causes the deaths of more women between the ages of 15 and 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined.[4] Up to 30 per cent of women in some countries report that their first sexual experience was forced.[5]

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[1] *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.I.12).

[2] United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2009: Maternal and Newborn Health* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.XX.7), December 2008.

[3] Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, *2008 Report on the global AIDS epidemic*.

[4] United Nations Development Fund for Women, Factsheet: Violence against Women Worldwide, 2009.

[5] ActionAid *Hit or miss? Women's rights and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2008.

**Conflict**

7. Since 1995, global military expenditure has risen from $855 billion[6] to $1.46 trillion in 2008.[7] Women play different roles in and around conflict — victims (particularly of rape), survivors, combatants and peace activists. However, very few women participate in formal peace negotiations.[8]

**The economy**

8. Forty-nine per cent of women of working-age are in paid employment worldwide (across the world).[9] Globally, the gender pay gap is estimated at 15.6 per cent and it tends to be higher in female-dominated work environments such as health care, education and social work.[10] However, in the financial sector in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, this gap rises to differences of 39 per cent in basic pay and 80 per cent in bonuses.[11]

**Power and decision-making**

9. Globally, only 17.7 per cent of seats in lower and upper legislative houses are held by women.[12] Only in Rwanda are there more women than men in parliament (56.3 per cent) and in eight countries there are no female parliamentarians.[13] Thirty-five per cent of Members of the European Parliament are women[14] and the United Nations has never had a female Secretary-General. Only 5 per cent of the FTSE 100 companies are headed by women.[15]

**Media**

10. Women are hugely underrepresented in (the) media coverage in 2005, 80 per cent of people featured in news stories worldwide were men and only 10 per cent of all news stories focused specifically on women.[16] The portrayal of women is more sexualized than that of men[17] and in the United States 85 per cent of advertisements portraying children in a sexualized manner are using images of girls.[18]

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[6] www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/RisingCostoftheGlobalWaronTerror_LKBehera_010108.

[7] www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending#WorldMilitarySpending.

[8] Tsjeard Bouta and Georg Frerks, *Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature Review and Institutional Analysis*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague, the Netherlands, 2002.

[9] *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009*.

[10] International Trade Union Confederation, *The Global Gender Pay Gap*, February 2008.

[11] See www.equalityhumanrights.com/media-centre.

[12] Women in Politics: 2008 (map).

[13] See seats held by women in national parliament, percentage available from mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx.

[14] Available from Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Inter-Parliamentary Union, www.europeanirish.com/news_details.php?news_id=2009.

[15] www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/nov/10/imperial-tobacco-alison-cooper.

[16] See Global Media Monitoring Project available from www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=974.

[17] Edited by Jane D. Brown, Jeanne R. Steele, Kim Walsh-Childers, *Sexual Teens, Sexual Media: Investigating Media's Influence on Adolescent Sexuality*. Routledge, New York, 2002.

[18] American Psychological Association, *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls*, 2007.

**Affirming the Beijing Declaration**

11. The key to advancing the status of women is to build and support strong and mutually respectful relationships between men and women, boys and girls. These relationships need to be based on the values of dignity, justice, peace, reconciliation and the equal value of all. Mothers' Union works to further these values and the goals of the Beijing Declaration in the following ways, across the world.

**Eliminating discrimination**

12. Eliminating discriminatory attitudes is fundamental to ending discrimination against women in practice. Through programme and policy work, Mothers' Union challenges discriminatory attitudes, such as those towards the sharing of responsibilities in the home and community and towards harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

**Participation of men**

13. Through our worldwide Parenting Programme, fathers are encouraged to participate in caring for children and other family responsibilities. The Literacy and Development Programme in Burundi, Malawi and the Sudan provides literacy and numeracy skills and also encourages men and women to discuss and address challenges together within their families and communities, especially the challenges of gender inequalities and domestic violence.

**Economic independence**

14. Mothers' Union members provide skills training in microenterprise, such as the cultivation of mushroom, tie-dying, poultry rearing and gardening. In the United Kingdom, Mothers' Union has lobbied the Government on equal pay and rights to flexible working and parental leave, to enable women to enjoy more equal and equitable participation in the labour market.

**Sustainable development through education**

15. In the 10 years since its launch, the Literacy and Development Programme has not only provided over 57,000 learners with literacy and numeracy education, it has also inspired the mobilization of 646 new development groups and empowered over 10,000 women to start their own post-literacy activities, such as community assistance, income generation, advocacy and the formation of savings and credit associations.

**Women promoting peace**

16. Mothers' Union members live in some of the most conflict-ridden areas of the world, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kenya, Myanmar, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Sudan and Zimbabwe. Following (the) civil unrest in Kenya, Mothers' Union has run post-conflict workshops bringing together women from neighbouring communities to talk through their emotions and rebuild relationships.

**Eliminating violence against women**

17. Mothers' Union provides education, training and resources on the prevention of violence against women, as well as practical support and women's refuges for those affected by such violence.

**Health**

18. In Malawi, Mothers' Union members educate groups of women about family planning and HIV/AIDS and how to access treatment. In Zimbabwe, members have raised money to build a shelter to serve as a waiting room for women who will be giving birth and for the provision of health equipment. In several countries, including Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and the Zambia, members are trained as traditional birth attendants.

**Media**

19. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Mothers' Union has been raising awareness of and campaigning against the use of the sexualized imagery of girls in advertising and marketing and sexualized products aimed at all children.

**Strengthening commitment to the Platform for Action**

20. Mothers' Union calls on Governments to strengthen their commitment to the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to achieve them hand in hand with the Millennium Development Goals. In particular, Governments need to:

(a) Eliminate all forms of institutional discrimination against women and counteract discriminatory attitudes in society through education, addressing the media's sexualized and violent representation of women and girls and strengthening commitment to all human rights;

(b) Invest in health care and health education, including the training of health-care workers, for all people at all stages of life and recognize that women are affected by the health of their whole family;

(c) Ensure that girls and women have equal access to and participation in education and training at all stages of life, including women and girls with caring responsibilities, those living in poverty and those living in rural areas;

(d) Prohibit discrimination and harassment in the workplace, including by eliminating the gender pay gap and the denial of land rights, and ensure that family-friendly work practices are available, for both women and men;

(e) Ensure fair and equal political participation for women, including freedom to vote and to take on genuine political leadership at all levels and relating to all political areas.